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ABSTRACT

From an educational standpoint, the most serious question that arises from faculty desegregation is the effect that negative or fearful emotional conditions among teachers will have on the children with whom they must work. As part of a larger project to study teacher needs, an investigation was conducted into teacher attitudes towards their pupils. The area of the investigation contained a number of schools which could be identified as predominantly black, Cuban, or native white and where the teaching staffs had been integrated. A semantic differential scale was constructed in accordance with the work of Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum. The scale was administered to a sample of teachers from six schools approximately two years after the desegregation order was carried out. Results indicated that there was no significant difference in the attitude of teachers toward the three groups of children at either primary or intermediate level. Teachers apparently were able to maintain reasonable objectivity towards the children themselves. (JA)

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THE EFFECT OF FACULTY DESEGREGATION ON TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR PUPILS

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A continuing concern of educators involved in school desegregation is the effect that inner-city school reassignment will have on teachers' attitudes. In the past, many white teachers have been reluctant to accept positions in black neighborhoods. This aversion was not limited to older teachers; a survey of the preferences of graduating students in education, conducted at the beginning of the school desegregation movement, found only 19 percent willing to teach in poverty-area schools.[1]

The staffing problem would appear to be even more difficult if the assignment to black schools is forced by court order or by some administrative quota system. A 1968 study compared the perceptions of volunteer and non-volunteer student teachers in ghetto schools in New York City, and found significant differences in racial attitudes between the two groups. Non-volunteers found the inner-city environment to be "ominous and threatening," while

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the volunteers did not.[2]

From an educational standpoint, the most serious question is the effect that negative or fearful emotional conditions among teachers will have on the children with whom they must work. School administrators and leaders of teacher organizations usually appeal to the "professionalism" of the classroom teachers, and nervously await the results. The danger to the children is apparent; if negative attitudes of teachers toward the inner-city area carry over into their treatment of pupils, there exists the possibility that faculty integration may compound, rather than alleviate, the difficulties of education in the ghetto.

As part of a larger project to study teacher needs, the investigator undertook the assessment of elementary teachers' perceptions of culturally-different children in Dade County (Miami), Florida. The public schools integrated their teaching staffs under court order in 1970. A black-white ratio was established for elementary, junior high and senior high schools, based upon the county-wide proportion of black and white teachers at each of the three levels. In the elementary schools this ratio was approximately 75 percent white teachers to 25 percent black teachers for each building.

A further complication in Dade County, which was ignored by the desegregation plan, was the tri-ethnic nature of the population. A recent demographic study by the county's Community Improvement Program determined that 23.6 percent of the residents

were Spanish-speaking (primarily Cuban refugees), 15 percent were black, and 61.4 percent were grouped as whites, Indians, and Orientals.[3] Although a variety of programs for desegregation of pupil populations have been implemented, geographic limitations and parent resistance have left many schools "racially identifiable."

Reassignment of teachers to meet the established quotas depended primarily upon seniority within each school, beginning with teachers in their second year with the school system. This did not, however, result in a flood of inexperienced instructors being sent into ghetto schools; many of the transferred teachers had taught for five or more years in other systems. Also, some of the more desirable schools in the county had had so little turnover that the teachers moved under the quota had been in the county for as long as eight or ten years.

The investigation into teacher attitudes toward their pupils was conducted in the North Central Area of the county because it contained a number of schools which could be identified as predominantly black, Cuban, or native white. The criterion for cultural differentiation was arbitrarily established as a 70 percent majority of one of the three racial or ethnic groups, and a cluster sample of two schools was randomly selected from each of the three strata.

All of the professional staff members in the six schools

served as the invited sample, with the exception of those teachers whose major responsibility was other than regular classroom instruction. The final sample included 46 teachers from the black schools, 53 from the Cuban schools, and 32 in the schools where native-born whites were in the majority. Of these 131 teachers, 67 were teaching in the intermediate grades and 64 at the primary level.

To investigate the possibility of differences in teachers' attitudes toward pupils on the basis of race or ethnic background, a semantic differential scale was constructed in accordance with the work of Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum.[4] Five polar pairs of terms were selected to describe three factors: evaluation (e.g., successful--unsuccessful), potency (strong--weak), and activity (active--passive). The resulting 15 pairs of terms were organized into a scale by randomly reversing the polarity of seven of the items and assigning each of the pairs a random position within the instrument. Each teacher was asked to consider only the class to which he was assigned, and to mark the seven-position scale between the polar items at the point that best described his or her particular group of children.

The scale was administered to the teachers in the six schools in 1972, approximately two years after the desegregation order was carried out. Anonymity of response was guaranteed, so that even the individual school could not be identified.

Only the majority race was indicated in tabulating the sets of scales.

The responses were divided into primary and intermediate levels, and the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance was applied to determine whether any statistically significant differences did, in fact, exist. The results were negative; all of the calculations using the Kruskal-Wallis procedure fell considerably below the critical value required for the .05 level of confidence. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted: there was no significant difference in the attitude of teachers toward the three groups of children at either the primary or the intermediate level on the three most important semantic factors.

Although this study was brief and narrow in scope, its implications are encouraging. Despite their fears of strange neighborhoods and their difficulties in coping with widely variant cultures, teachers apparently were able to maintain reasonable objectivity toward the children themselves. To this extent, the faculty desegregation process in Dade County was successful. Teacher acceptance of assignments in poverty neighborhoods is assuring the predominantly black schools of integrated faculties which are not negative toward their pupils.

FOOTNOTES

[1]R. Graham, "The Teacher Corps: One Place to Begin," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 52 (1968), 49-61.

[2]P. Freedman, Racial Attitude as a Factor in Teacher Education for the Deprived Child. Educational Resources Information Center, (1968), ED 026334.

[3]"Dade Gives the Label of 'Tri-Ethnic' Community," Miami News, (May 27, 1972), 6A.

[4]C. Osgood, G. Suci, and P. Tannenbaum, The Measurement of Meaning (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967).